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Cuba: Thorn or Spear?

What next in Cuba?

The failure of the counter-revolution is being investigated now by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Central Intelligence Agency Director, Allen Dulles, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. But we don't have to wait for them for the main lesson, which is that whatever course we now adopt toward Cuba, it must not again end in failure.

Three choices appear now to face President Kennedy and the nation:

1. To launch into Cuba with U.S. troops and sweep the Castro regime away on the grounds that it is a totalitarian oppression and openly hostile to us.

2. To adopt guerrilla, subversive, and other unconventional "paramilitary" tactics to induce the overthrow of the regime.

3. To sit still awhile in the hope that the regime contains the seeds of its own destruction, or can at least be "contained."

To adopt the first course is, without any doubt, to flout world opinion, and the tactical as well as the moral cost needs to be carefully counted.

For there are two battles involved here. The first is the battle for Cuba, which we could probably win tomorrow if we chose to openly intervene with sufficient weight, and if we did not precipitate a world war. The second is the battle for men's minds, a battle fought not with guns but by example. We must convince ourselves whether in these unbalanced times, in this shrunken world, we can win the first battle at the expense of losing the second.

The second course, namely, unconventional or guerrilla warfare, has attracted attention in Washington the past few years. The Communists have used guerrilla and subversive tactics of intervention with success for many years, always staying short of massive war. They have by these means nibbled so much of the world that it is not merely justifiable but imperative that we consider playing them at their own game. Reliance on conventional arms and massive nuclear retaliation is not always enough to guarantee our safety.

As to the third course, it is earnestly to be hoped that the Castro totalitarianism does in fact contain the seeds of its own destruction. Unfortunately, the failure of the recent invasion appears to have regained for Castro some of the popular support he has lost in the past 18 months.

Unfortunately, too, the history of past Communist revolutionary takeovers is not encouraging: there is no instance so far of a Communist revolution being reversed. The reason simply is that, to the Communist, revolution is justifiable only once, namely in order to attain a Communist regime. Once that regime is established, further revolution becomes "immoral," and to be quelled by any ruthlessness. For

the Communist, in fact, revolution is a one-way street, and this is the lesson of Hungary.

Whether the Communists can make this double-talk stick within 90 miles of the American coastline, with all the cross-currents of a free hemisphere to persuade otherwise, is a debatable question.

Unfortunately we no longer have much time left for debate. If the traditional Latin American revolution is now to become a one-way street for Communist takeover of Latin America country by country, our peril is already grave.

In these circumstances, we would be wise to develop our capacity in the direction of the second alternative, which is unconventional warfare. We should train guerrilla troops and develop suitable tactics, so that if the thorn in our side becomes a spear at our backs, we will at least have a fighting chance.

The world at large is welcome to its opinion, but it can hardly expect us to defend ourselves with both hands tied behind our backs.